

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MANAGU 03328 212225Z

ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 INT-05 AID-05 HA-05 OES-09 SS-15

SP-02 PM-05 SAA-01 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-02

ICAE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 INRE-00 DODE-00 GSA-02

PC-05 /081 W

-----021357 212239Z /64

O R 212134Z JUL 78

FM AMEMBASSY MANAGUA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7204

INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

AMEMBASSY PANAMA

AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

SAN SALVADOR 2390

AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

USCINCSO CANAL ZONE

UNCLAS MANAGUA 3328

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: TPHY, NU

SUBJECT: EARTHQUAKE RUMORS COMPOUND NICARAGUA'S PROBLEMS

1. IN THE LAST 24 HOURS RUMORS OF IMPENDING NATURAL DISASTER HAVE BEGUN TO CIRCULATE AMONG ALL SEGMENTS OF MANAGUA'S POPULATION. RADIO NEWS REPORTS HAVE INDICATED THAT THE US GOVERNMENT HAS WARNED THE GON AND PRESIDENT SOMOZA OF AN IMPENDING EARTHQUAKE WHICH WOULD EXCEED IN SEVERITY THE SEISMIC EVENT WHICH OCCURRED HERE IN DECEMBER 1972. EMBASSY BELIEVES IT HAS IDENTIFIED POSSIBLE SOURCE OF THESE RUMORS BUT CONCLUDES THAT PUTTING IMMEDIATELY THE MATTER IN PERSPECTIVE MAY BE DIFFICULT.

2. ON JULY 20 AT 3:17 AND 3:34 A.M. LOCAL TWO SEISMIC SHOCKS HIT MANAGUA. THE FIRST WAS MEASURED AT 3.5 RICHTER AND THE SECOND AT 5.0. RICHTER. THE LATTER HAD ITS EPICENTER 40 KILOMETERS DUE WEST OF PUERTO SOMOZA ON NICARAGUA'S PACIFIC

UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 MANAGU 03328 212225Z

COAST AT A DEPTH OF 70 KILOMETERS. IT APPEARS THAT SINCE MAY 30 THERE HAVE BEEN AT LEAST SEVEN TREMORS MEASURED AT 4.0 RICHTER OR HIGHER IN THE SAME GENERAL VICINITY OF THE MESOAMERICAN TRENCH, WITH PERHAPS AS MANY AS 200 OR MORE REGISTERING BELOW 4.0 RICHTER OVER A SHORT TIME SPAN.

3. THE DIRECTOR OF NICARAGUA'S INSTITUTE OF SEISMIC INVESTIGATIONS (WHICH IS PART OF THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS) HAS FOUND THIS SEQUENCE ALARMING AND BY LETTER DATED JULY 20 TO THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS, EXPRESSED HIS CONCERN, STATING THAT THERE EXISTS ALONG THE MESO-AMERICAN TRENCH A FAULT SYSTEM ALONG WHICH SEISMIC INCIDENTS OF 7.0 RICHER OR MORE WOULD NOT BE ABNORMAL. IN THIS SAME COMMUNICATION, THE INSTITUTE'S DIRECTOR, ING. ARTURO ABURTO QUEZADA, ADDED THAT THE OR HIS INSTITUTE HAD BEEN IN CONSULTATION WITH THE US GEOLOGICAL SURVEY IN MENLO PARK, CALIFORNIA, WHICH HAD, HE INDICATED, EXPRESSED AGREEMENT WITH THE INSTITUTE'S OBSERVATIONS THAT THE ALASKAN EARTHQUAKE WHICH REGISTERED 6.7 RICHTER HAD OCCURRED AFTER MANY EARLIER SHOCKS REGISTERING MAGNITUDES CLUSTERING AROUND 5.0 RICHTER. BASED ON THE PHENOMENA WHICH ARE OCCURRING NOW, THE DIRECTOR SAID, IT WAS HIS OBLIGATION TO CALL FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CIVIL DEFENSE MEASURES WITH THE SHORTEST POSSIBLE DELAY.

4. WITH THE CURRENT LEVEL OF INSURRECTIONIST VIOLENCE, AND ESPECIALLY LAST NIGHT'S ROCKET ATTACK ON GN HEADQUARTERS, THERE IS FERTILE GROUND FOR ALL KINDS OF

MISINTERPRETATION OF TRUE EVENTS AND THE GROWTH AND RAPID SPREAD OF RUMORS. EMBASSY IS DENYING CATE-
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PAGE 03 MANAGU 03328 212225Z

GORICALLY, IF ASKED, THAT THERE HAS BEEN ANY COMMUNICATION FROM THE USG TO THE GON PREDICTING NATURAL DISASTER WITHIN FIXED TIME SPAN. EVEN SO, REPORTS THAT USG IS SOURCE OF SUCH PREDICTIONS AND THAT MAJOR EARTHQUAKE IS LIKELY TO OCCUR WITHIN 48 HOURS CONTINUE TO SPREAD.

5. ACTION REQUESTED: REQUEST STATE DEPARTMENT CONTACT APPROPRIATE US GEOLOGICAL SURVEY OR OTHER SEISMIC AUTHORITY

TO OBTAIN BEST DESCRIPTION OF RECENT EVENTS IN AND AROUND NICARAGUA AND MOST ACCURATE ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT SITUATION.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: EARTHQUAKES, ALLEGATIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 21 jul 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: n/a
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment:
Disposition Date: 01 jan 1960
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MANAGU03328
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780300-1015
Format: TEL
From: MANAGUA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780734/aaaabcjm.tel
Line Count: 108
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: d3eb146f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: n/a
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 mar 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: N/A
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1927837
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: EARTHQUAKE RUMORS COMPOUND NICARAGUA'S PROBLEMS
TAGS: TPHY, NU
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odb://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d3eb146f-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014